



PROPOSED INPUTS ON SCHOOL EDUCATION FOR THE UPCOMING NEW EDUCATION POLICY

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ABSTRACT

The government's effort to revamp the education system through a New Education Policy calls for a serious and critical discussion on the quality of schooling and education. There has been a collaborative consultative process starting from the grassroot level up to the ministries and departments to include everyone's suggestions and perspectives. This paper offers a few inputs on school education which directly affect the quality of education and students. The list is not exhaustive but confines itself to the discussion of significant and critical issues present in the education system.

KEYWORDS: low fee private schools, pre-education, secondary education, teacher education, cce and ndp.

Education system in India has witnessed many changes during recent years. Various policies and programs have been undertaken to improve the education scenario in the country. To name few important ones; Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid Day Meal program, Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan and the most binding being the Right to Education Act 2009, this provides free and compulsory education to the children of 6 to 14 years of age. Now the government is looking forward to bring out a New Education Policy to revamp the education system. Till now India has got 2 national policies on education, one in 1968, the next in 1986 and one revised plan of action in 1992.

1. National policy on education 1968: This policy came after the recommendation of the Education Commission or more popularly known as Kothari Commission (1964-66). It laid special emphasis on establishing a National System of Education to achieve national goals.

2. National policy on education 1986: This policy called for social integration and focussed on building human resource to promote technological and economic development.

3. Plan of Action in 1992 as modified under national policy on education in 1986 focused on providing equal educational opportunities to all and also recommended changes in the scheme of examination.

Now almost after 25 years government has once again taken the task of framing a new education policy. The Ministry of Human Resource Development states that the New Education Policy should lead to knowledge, capability and employment. The objectives of the policy as stated by the MHRD are:

1. To meet the changing dynamics of population requirement with regard to quality education, innovation and research.
2. Aim to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its student's with necessary skills and knowledge.
3. To eliminate shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics and industry.

The MHRD has undertaken a collaborative consultative process which involves multiple stakeholders. The consultation is going out at 3 levels: a) online b) grassroot c) national, on 33 themes out of which 13 are for school education and rest for higher education. Also, suggestions are invited from other ministries and departments to devise the policy from their perspectives too.

Out of the many issues that are important for improving the school education I will be discussing those themes which require immediate attention. The following are the proposed themes that need to be looked upon seriously:

1. Improving Learning Outcomes at Elementary level
2. Regulate and monitor private schools
3. Preschool education should be made compulsory
4. Universalise Secondary Education
5. Improve Teacher Education Institutes and Teacher Quality
6. Child Centred Curriculum, Pedagogy and Evaluation

1. Improving learning outcomes at elementary level

Soon after RTE Act 2009, which made elementary education free and compulsory, the enrolment rates at elementary level have increased considerably, nearly

100 percent. This has brought us near to our goal of UEE and EFA. However research suggests primarily ASER and NCAER that though enrolment rates have increased considerably, the learning outcomes have gone down drastically. A class 5 student cannot read simple text and comprehend class 2 textbook and cannot solve a simple maths problem. It means even though children are going to school, they are learning nothing.

The new policy needs to focus on improving the learning level outcomes at elementary level. The focus should be on finding out the reasons for low learning achievements, assessing the curriculum, teaching learning processes, and evaluation system in the light of NCF 2005, ensuring to provide skilled and motivated teachers having good subject knowledge and trained in innovative pedagogies.

2. Regulate and monitor private schools

In the past 15 years or so there has been a sudden expansion of private schools in India. There are these Low Fee Private Schools which as name suggest cater to the economically disadvantaged section of the society. Researchers found out low fee private schools are gaining momentum in both urban and rural India. There has been universal preference on part of parents to go for private schools despite state providing free elementary education under the onus of RTE Act 2009. The main reason is English medium stature of these schools and a perception that learning outcome is better than government schools. However the quality of education provided in these schools is still questionable. Can we actually rely on Low Fee Private schools established for making profit to provide education to our children? Till now there has been no serious effort to regulate and monitor private schools specially those which are unrecognised.

The new education policy should provide for regulating the admission criteria for students, recruitment, training and remuneration of the teachers. Also the curriculum and the pedagogies followed in the school should be in consonance with the NCF 2005. The state needs to monitor and regulate the working and functioning of private schools before it creates socio economic inequalities and further degrade the education system.

3. Preschool education should be made compulsory

Pre-education i.e. the education a child goes through before formal education is an important part of child's life. Early years are critical for his growth and development. At this time the child has an amazing ability to quickly and effortlessly absorb knowledge than the later years.

He needs to be exposed to new learning opportunities and learning environment. It lays the foundation for his formal education and prepares him for academic and social pursuits of life.

The state recognises the importance of pre-school education in child's growing years, however till now it has not been made as compulsory provision. Just like RTE act, pre-school education should be made compulsory under law and all children 3 years and above should receive pre education. Pre-school education includes Anganwadis, creches, baalwadis, day care centers, nursery, and kindergarten. It also requires proper training and preparation of pre primary teachers who can facilitate in holistic development of a child and help him to explore, discover and construct his own knowledge.

4. Universalise Secondary Education

With the coming up of RTE Act there has been a sharp increase in enrolment rate and retention rate at elementary level which has increased the demand for secondary education. A complete school education in India requires elementary, sec-

ondary and senior secondary education. One of the flagship program of the government included Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) in 2009 which aimed to fulfil the objective of providing accessible, affordable and quality secondary education to all. It laid focus on ICT, vocational education. However the data reveals that there is dearth of secondary schools in comparison with the elementary schools along with shortage of qualified and trained teachers. It becomes necessary to universalise secondary education to provide a complete school education and to prepare the young minds for employment. Elementary education is too basic and does not provide life skills for productive employment. The new education policy should work upon improving and universalising secondary education which becomes accessible not only in terms of geographical coverage but also in terms of social and gender inclusion.

5. Improve Teacher Education Institutes and Teacher Quality

The quality of teaching determines the quality of education. Right from the beginning all the commissions and policies have been pointing to the importance of a good teacher education institute and quality teachers for a better education system. Any attempts to transform the teaching learning process through curriculum renewal, change in pedagogic practices and child centred education cannot materialize if schoolteachers are not prepared for and proactively engaged in the transformation process.

The new education policy should lay emphasis on the following:

- The National Council of Teacher Education, NCTE needs to strongly regulate both public and private teacher education institutes and ensure close monitoring of the quality and standards of these institutes.
- The need is to close the gap between learner's curriculum and teacher's curriculum. The prospective teachers should be trained in learner centered, activity based participatory learning experiences able to analyse and reflect on her teaching.
- Teachers need to be given the authority and autonomy to make changes in selection of knowledge, choice of materials/textbooks and the teaching learning process as per the requirement of their students.

A well designed teacher education curriculum, regulated teacher education institutes, and a cadre of well qualified, trained and an empowered teaching workforce are crucial prerequisites of a school system that seeks quality education and social transformation.[1]

6. Child centred curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation

NCF 2005 and RTE Act 2009 with its provision of CCE and NDP have focussed on child centred education. Curriculum, pedagogy and evaluation are interconnected and changes in one will surely influence the other. The education in schools should be child centred where each child gets an opportunity to explore and construct his own knowledge. He should be given enough freedom and choice to ask questions, discuss, debate and present his point of views. The aim of education should be to develop an independent, engaged and thinking individual. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation CCE and No detention policy NDP have been two critical provisions under RTE Act 2009 which need to be read together and in consonance with other provisions like low pupil teacher ratio, no corporal punishment. CCE involves continuous and comprehensive (cognitive and non cognitive) evaluation of a child. But CCE is mistaken to be short frequency tests which increase the stress level of children and workload of teachers. CCE if implemented properly will help in identifying the learning gaps, to which the teacher can take appropriate steps by making changes in the curriculum and pedagogy to meet the learning need of the child. NDP which allows children to complete elementary education is another landmark in Indian education. As it is well known exams create a fear in the minds of pupils and detention creates labels for the child and further discourages and demotivates him. It is the right of every child to receive basic skills and knowledge up to 8th standard. However this has been misunderstood as no exams till 8th standard which has lead to lack of seriousness on the part of students, teachers and parents as there is no fear of detention. However these two provisions are necessary part of child centred education and need to be implemented together.

The new education policy should refocus on these schemes and should work on the successful implementation of it. The necessary steps to be taken are; preparing and training the teachers for these provisions, making textbooks amenable with CCE, providing clear cut guidelines and adequate resource support, maintaining pupil teacher ratio and making parents aware of it.

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